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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 TAIPEI 002641

SIPDIS

STATE PLEASE PASS TO AIT/W AND EAP/RSP/TC

STATE PLEASE ALSO PASS TO USEPA/OIA

FROM AIT KAOHSIUNG BRANCH OFFICE

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [AMGT](#) [SENV](#) [ECON](#) [KSCA](#) [KPAO](#) [TW](#) [ESTH](#)

SUBJECT: TORENTIAL RAINS POUND SOUTHERN TAIWAN

1. Summary. Torrential rains have pounded southern Taiwan for several days, severely damaging agricultural operations and disrupting both air and ground transportation. At least seven people have died in storm related incidents and 2,000 people are trapped in mountainous areas in Pingtung County due to landslides cutting off road access. Officials expect damage to mount as rains are expected to continue for several more days. There is worry that damage may spread to central Taiwan as the heavy rains move northward. Political infighting has stalled funding for proposed government flood control programs. End Summary

Heavy Rain and Landslides

2. Torrential rains continue to batter southern Taiwan as a storm front has lingered over the island for several days, causing severe flooding in southern Taiwan. Daily rainfall amounts for each of the last five days have exceeded the historical averages for a normal month of June. Flooding was worst in Pingtung and Kaohsiung Counties, with additional major crop damage in Tainan County. At least seven people have died in the floods, which local officials describe as the worst in 30 years. Schools in Pingtung County and some southern cities were closed on June 13.

3. Heavy rains have severely disrupted air and ground transportation, with many flights being cancelled and major roads closed. Tainan and Hengchun Airports were closed for most of June 12 and 13. Route 17, and major connector in Pingtung County has been closed in several locations due to flooding and landslides. Major bridges in Kaohsiung, Pingtung and Chiayi counties have been closed to traffic.

4. About 40,000 households in Pingtung County lost electricity, but most had power restored quickly. The Central Weather Bureau continues to issue warnings against heavy rains island wide. The Council of Agriculture has also issued a red alert landslide warning for 116 creeks in southern Taiwan. Residents of these areas have been cautioned to be on alert for more landslides and flooding as it is estimated that the rain will last until next week. Emergency authorities have called in military troops and equipment to aid in rescue and evacuation efforts. Local weather officials expect the heavy rain to gradually move into central Taiwan over the next few days, prompting fears of more flooding there. Central Taiwan suffered heavy flooding earlier in the year during another period of heavy rainfall.

Agricultural and Economic Impact

5. The Council of Agriculture estimates damage to agricultural losses at approximately NT\$170 million, including NT\$107 million in crops, NT\$66 million in livestock and NT\$0.5 million in fisheries. Kaohsiung County suffered the most agricultural damage, with NT\$17.2 million in losses, but Agricultural officials say those figures will be revised upwards as the rains are expected to continue for several days. An estimated 2,474 hectares of crops have been flooded, with 27 percent of these fields having their crops completely destroyed.

6. Rice, leafy vegetables and various seasonal fruits were the hardest hit. Prices for these items in Kaohsiung markets are five to ten times normal levels, and leafy vegetables are particularly scarce. On 13 June, heavy rains concentrated in Tainan County had a severe impact on agricultural operations there. Agricultural officials are still estimating the damage, but expect most farmers in the region to qualify for government assistance. They said that estimated damage will likely double as new assessments come in. The Department of Finance stated that those who suffered from the flooding could apply for government subsidies as well as several tax exemptions. Agriculture officials say that the damage to livestock was limited due to the fact that most hog raising operations in the Kaoping River basin, the area hardest hit by the flooding, had been

relocated to other areas in 2003. Their relocation was part of a government-led effort to reduce pollution from farm runoff in order to clean up the Kaoping River, which supplies most of the drinking water for Kaohsiung City.

Government Reaction

17. In response to the flooding, on June 13 Premier Frank Hsieh urged the Legislative Yuan (LY) to pass a bill for an eight-year NT\$80 billion flood-control project. That bill was forwarded to the LY by the Executive Yuan is in limbo as it awaits the next LY session in September. Earlier this month, the Democratic Progress Party (DPP) suggested holding a special LY session in July to focus on bills such as this which it claims are urgent. Opposition parties have yet to agree to the plan.